

Pre-White House Conference on Aging
Sponsored by the Southwest Regional Council of the Pennsylvania Council on Aging
Event Report
May 19, 2005

Common Themes of the Day

The Fragmented Process of Senior Services

(Multiple agencies design the wheel for the consumer)

The problem stems from not looking at the whole person and how they are served, but as a set of isolated and unrelated issues. Consumers are viewed to have fragmented problems. Services should be tailored to individual consumer needs. Consumer must have the knowledge about what is available, a choice of services, and an appropriate level of self-direction over their own service plan.

The Need for Better Connectedness to Prevent Competition over Resources

The lack of connectedness and communication among those who provide services perpetuates the fight over limited resources. Often good programs are losing funding while support for new programming increases, leaving tested and established programs in danger of losing funding and being eliminated. Advocacy is needed for the programs that are working, but are in danger of losing resources and funding.

The Lack of Coordination in a Disjointed Service Delivery System

Consumers become very frustrated with the absence of a unified service delivery system. Poor collaboration and coordination of services among the agencies limits the quality of service received by consumers. In addition, poor communication to the public about the issues and available services limits their knowledge and awareness. Finally, the “silo” and bureaucratic approach of government services (separation of delivery between Aging, Welfare, SSA, etc.) creates automatic barriers to progressive and visionary methods of improving service delivery.

Barriers

1. Bureaucracy (red tape) due to fragmentation. Tendency to look at problems more from the government’s view rather than the consumer’s views. Each of the Aging, Housing and Welfare Departments operates too independently.
2. Lack of communication and knowledge about what is available to general public and to consumers. Lack of internal communication among the AAA and related organizations.
3. Lack of personnel to provide services.
4. Services are available in concentrated areas (urban), but are not always widespread across whole populous.
5. Agencies lack communication and are separated by service areas.

6. Lack of cooperation between government departments, such as inherent separations between local AAA and providers.

Solutions

1. Collaboration, a unified central system
 - Communicate among agencies to reduce overlap.
 - Focus on consumer view rather than government view.
 - Reduce fragmentation by centralizing services.
2. Increased Awareness and communication about services
 - A “211” helpline for senior services.
 - Educational outreach in senior centers.
 - Communication between agencies, as well as with the general public.
3. Better prioritizing of dollars
 - The corporate world needs to be motivated to tap into resources available and provide information to employees, making their systems more caring and supportive. Tax credits or financial incentives for corporations that work to address the issues facing senior consumers should be considered:
Example: “Silver Sneakers” program sponsored by Highmark to encourage senior physical well-being.
 - Inclusion and encouragement of faith-based and other types of volunteer programs to fill in gaps due to lack of government program funding.

Summary

In general, the gathering felt it was time to look “holistically” at aging consumers being served in a way that all needs (housing, transportation, home and community -based services, etc.) can be coordinated with a minimum of overlap and confusion.

One governmental department, beginning at the federal level, should be created to respond to aging programs, services and financing.

There is a very high need to eliminate inequity in the eligibility across services/programs. Standardized requirements/eligibility for services would go a long way toward addressing the many concerns about barriers to services raised by the participants.

Simply put, we are looking leadership in these areas from the federal, state and local government administrations in cooperation with the many fine service organizations which complete the existing network of support for the elderly in our communities.